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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE COMRADES OF THE REVOLUTIONARY WORKERS LEAGUE.

New York September 1937

Dear comrades:

It is almost nine years since we together broke definitely with the counter-revolutionary wing that once led the Communist Party. Our split was supposed to represent a Marxian reaction to the opportunist line that brought the world proletariat from one defeat to another. Although we broke together from the Stalinist-Bucharin line ideologically and organizationally, we stood apart from you for the reason that ideologically we were part of the left faction of the Italian Communist Party which fundamental documents are to be found in the Roma thesis. These documents were a contrast to all the political past of Cannon and Shachtman who at that time only borrowed from the Russian opposition. Under the leadership of Leon Trotsky the International Left Opposition from the beginning stood for the reform of the Communist International misjudging therefore, the fundamental reason that brought the opportunist to the head of the C.I. That fundamental reason was represented by the many defeats of the proletariat, upon which defeats the counter-revolution found strength. While the opposition was swimming in this illusion the ideological ground to dissolve itself into the rotten second international was laid down. You will agree with us that Trotsky did to destroy the Communist movement what Stalin was not able to do.

While the International Bureau was splitting groups, and liquidating the rest by sending them into the Socialist Party; from that time on they disappeared from the proletarian horizon. On the German situation Trotsky build up a theory that it was possible to have a proletarian Revolution with a centrist patriotic leadership. This negative conception of the nature of bureaucracy and opportunism, and the anti-Lenin concept of the historical significance and necessity of a Communist Party--all this brought a lot of confusion into the ranks of the Left Opposition, which consist of many sincere communists. Our faction fought all lines of Trotsky, politically as well as organizationally, and it cannot be otherwise because the organizational question is bound up with the political.

We will not mention the whole history of the Left Opposition which you all well know. We will merely call to your attention a few facts which characterize the entire Trotsky movement and line. The Leninist method of interpretation of the revolutionary movement of the proletariat and the role of its historical guide is the opposite of the methods of Trotsky ever since 1903. When we communist state that without the historical organ the proletariat cannot be victorious, we mean exactly what we assert. The whole post war experience and particularly the Spanish conflict shows that this Marxian concept still holds.

When you comrades split with the Workers Party in order not to join the Socialist Party it was a healthy reaction against the line of Trotsky and you were on the road of Marxism on the conception of the independence of the Communist vanguard. When you broke off with Cannon and Shachtman outfit this brought us nearer. As a fact we had a long discussion on principle questions that concerned the proletariat movement as a whole. We all know the results of that discussion period. It was too mechanical and sectarian, not from the political point of view, but the way the groups were proceeding. To be of any help toward the establishment of a real American Left Faction of Communism, which is a preliminary necessity to build up, in the course of the class struggle and the revolutionary events, a real Communist Party. Anyway we believe that the ideas and programs could show their ability when they were tested by events. The Spanish conflict offers the opportunity to each and every group the test for their theories and principles and to learn the strength and weakness of their line; who ever lost their chance to learn from the Spanish events, the tactics and technic of a well developed capitalism is not a Marxist.

Our Fraction did not take anything from the Permanent Revolution and analysed critically the history of the labor movement; the great work of Lenin with a mighty experience of the October Revolution was the only one that seen from the beginning what was the situation in Spain. Our faction did not try to copy the historical movement that appeared from March to October in the Russian Revolution. We cannot apply anything but critically analyze each event. To apply to Spain what was good for the October Revolution it means not to understand the difference of a historical situation and the rule of the counter revolutionist that are dealing in the proletariat front. Immediately after the Spanish proletariat gave up their weapon (General Strike) the only weapon to lead and destroy the capitalist state, they became victims of the capitalist state.

When you start a insurrection et her you strike hard and go forward and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat, as the only weapon to destroy your enemy, or else you go back. In the Spanish situation when the proletariat instead of extending a general strike directed against the capitalist state gives up their weapon to turn in the territorial front that was a big blow to themselves which can hardly be repaired on the immediate future. It is a fact that right after the fourth and fifth day of the general strike the capitalist class went on and on consolidating their power. Our fraction were the only ones under the slander and calumny of all parties and groups, and even at the cost of a split in the organization, stood for the class line.

For our fraction the counter-revolutionary situation in Spain came right after the proletariat gave up the general strike and not after the anti-fascists were disarmed or when the independent army was annihilated under the Valencia Government.

The fact that the anti-fascists committees as well as the independent militia those were controlled by the same political organizations which has shown the counter-revolutionary rule. The slogan that our fraction gave at that time was the following: "Away from the front, turn the imperialist war into a civil war" and all that goes with it. What is your position comrades of the R.W.L. Now, not in July 1936.

At the meeting at Irving Plaza when your Secretary, Hugo Oehler exposed the political line of the League, made us understand, that the official line is purely a left tail of the Popular Front. At that meeting we clearly saw the position of all the American groups, the Trotskyites, the Weisbordites, the Fieldists and your position, which in our opinion, makes an American P.O.U.M, that is from the class point of view, the political line that comrade Oehler defended stands on the other side of the proletariat interest. Hugo Oehler, in his speech tried to avoid assuming any political position, but as we have expected, in the discussion period he did take a position. First of all he did not answer any questions that our comrades presented; he took plenty of time to answer all the other groups although in a sarcastic manner. In answering some other questions indirectly he gave an answer to our question and especially when he criticized the Trotskyites for giving material aid to Valencia Government. In this question he said the following: We do not support the Valencia Government, but we do not sabotage those liberals and others that send their aid to the Valencia government." That means he remains neutral on this vital question, although he recognizes that this material aid is used against those who fight the reactionary government of Valencia.

This position is just the same as the one held by the Italian Socialist Party on the world war, "Neither support nor sabotage." This line is a little to the right of the centrist Balabanoff line and Zimmerwald. On the question of insurrection also our friend Oehler made some very important statements.

He said, we do not stand for defeatism of the loyalist army. Then do you support the capitalist army? Or you stay inbetween? What is your conception of the revolution anyway? Can the proletariat be successful without destroying all those organs that makes the capitalist state of which the army is the essential factor? No revolutionary phraseology, no historical parallels will save you from a wrong position that you are holding. Objectively your line help to keep the workers in illusions and therefore you help the capitalist against the proletariat. If your organization justifies itself on the basis of the Permanent Revolution in fighting the reaction in Spain side by side with the democracy then you make a class differentiation between fascism and democracy and that means that if tomorrow Nazi Germany attacks democratic France or CechoSolaki then the duty of the proletariat is to fight to save democracy. That will bring us back to 1914.

Comrades, we know that all of your members of the RWL do not agree with what Oehler and the Political Committee say on the Spanish situation. We do not believe it. You may think that this is a matter that concerns only the RWL but we believe that this fundamental question concerns the proletariat in general and that you will not solve the problem through a internal discussion. When it comes a matter that concerns the class you must come out and fight openly just as our faction has done a year ago when the opposition appeared.

We are writing to you this letter for the reason that we believe it is our duty to say openly what we think of the political line of the R.W.L., and hope that we together will be able to form an American section of the International Fraction of Communism.

Comradely yours,

The New York Group of the Italian Section of the International Left Fraction of Communism

THE ULTRA LEFT POSITION OF THE LEFT FACTION OF COMMUNISM

The open letter of the New York group of the Left Fraction of Communism, (Bordigist Group) to the Revolutionary Workers League of the United States, on the question of the Spanish Civil War presents a position in the name of Marxism, which if followed would lead the proletariat to defeat. It is the opposite position of the Trotsky centrists. Whereas, the position of, "political criticism and material aid to the Peoples Front," aids the Peoples Front in its struggle against the proletariat and peasants, the Left Fraction of Communism position of "revolutionary defeatism" for Spain at present gives objective aid to the Fascists bourgeois. The Revolutionary Workers League of the United States rejects both the Trotsky centrist position and the bordigist ultra-left position.

Before we deal with the question regarding the conflict in Spain we desire to take up some of the other points raised in the letter.

1-The very name of the group has nothing in common with Marxism. To call the group the International Left Fraction of Communism, elevating "Left Fraction of Communism into a permanent tendency reveals ultra-leftism. A communist must be a Marxist. In the Communist Party or group disputed questions finds the Marxists today a "right" faction against ultra-left deviations, and tomorrow a "left" faction against opportunist deviations, and the next day a "center" faction when both deviations must be fought at once.

2-The letter states, "Our faction did not take anything from the Permanent Revolution and analyze critically the history of the Labor movement." At this point we desire to deal with only one aspect of this sentence. The Revolutionary Workers League stands on the theory of the Permanent Revolution, the position which is identical with Lenin's position. The left fraction in rejecting this position rejects another basic tenet of Marxism.

3-The open letter states, "Immediately after the Spanish Proletariat gave up the weapon (General Strike) the only weapon to lead and destroy the capitalist state, they became victims of the capitalist state." To present the general strike as the decisive weapon for the overthrow of capitalism is to fall into the swamp of all the half baked syndicalists. The general strike as a step within the framework of the road to power is correct, but to elevate it to this primary position is to insure defeat. If the general strike is not carried over into the insurrection with all of the broadest political implications flowing from this the struggle is sure to end as an abortion.

4-The letter states that Oehler tried to avoid taking a position on the question of revolutionary defeatism. The comrades present at this meeting must have been asleep. A considerable part of Oehlers speech was devoted to the theoretical question of revolutionary defeatism and the slogan of march separate and strike together. The other points raised by the letter are answered by the PC document that we present here. All of this material was presented at the New York meeting the letter speaks of. The other ultra-left errors of the "Left Fraction of Communism" can not be dealt with in this letter.

5-We will now present the Political Committee position of the question of the open letter, presenting our position against the Trotskyites, the POUM, and the Bordigist. The P.C. position was adopted in August and merely represented a summary of our position since the July 1936 uprising.

MARCH SEPARATE AND STRIKE TOGETHER

L* The centrist Trotskyites have filled the correct slogan of "March separately and Strike together" with the following content in the Spanish Civil War: "For political criticism and material aid to the Peoples Front."

To give material aid to the Peoples Front is a negation of the concept of marching separately. To march separately means the political and organizational independent action not only against the enemy, the fascists bourgeoisie, but also against the democratic bourgeoisie. To march separately and strike together means to apply a different strategy to fight one enemy on two fronts. To give material aid to one of the two wings of the capitalist enemy is to repudiate the two-fold strategy of marching separately and striking together and is capitulation to the Peoples Front.

2-Some argue that because there are no Soviets, there is no other recourse open but to give material aid to the Peoples Front. But the same peoples say that if there were Soviets, material aid should not be given to the Peoples Front which means that to give aid to the Peoples Front if there are Soviets would be criminal. On this basis Soviets can never be built. Material aid to the Peoples Front is the best guarantee to prevent the creation of Soviets.

To try to bridge this gap by the argument that material aid to the Peoples Front State should be under rigid working class control is cover up with words the capitulation to the Peoples Front State. There can be no such thing as rigid or any other kind of workers control of a bourgeois state.

To confuse the slogan of "workers control of production" with "rigid workers control of material aid to a bourgeois state" is to negate Marxist teaching and class action against the capitalists.

3- Likewise, to argue that because there is no Marxian Party in Spain we must give material aid to the centrist POUM, and at the same time to imply that if there were a Marxian Party, it would be criminal to support the POUM is to carry out in the relation to the party what the Trotskyites present in relation to the question of the State. Political "criticism" of the POUM and its leadership and material aid to the POUM is the best way to prevent the creation of a revolutionary Marxian organization.

To confuse material aid to workers organizations in struggle, in action, with material aid to the Peoples Front bourgeois STATE as the Trotskyites do, is to revise Marxism on a basic question.

4- We give material aid only to the Revolutionary Marxian organization, or that group or force that is working for the creation of the Revolutionary Marxian Party. When workers mass organizations, trade unions, Soviets, etc., are in action against the capitalist we give them full material aid. To the latter condition the Marxists apply the slogan, "political criticism and material aid", and not to the Bourgeois State.

What shall the revolutionists do if they can intervene in the sending of material aid by reformists to the Peoples Front? Above all the revolutionists must point to the futility of such aid for the workers interests, endeavor to convince workers under reformist and centrist ideology that material aid must be given only to the Marxists, only to revolutionists in action against the capitalists.

5- But there is more to this question than mere propaganda. Shall the revolutionists if they are strong enough, prevent the shipment of aid to the Peoples Front Government? This part of the question is the tactical aspect of the former principle question. Let us recapitulate to the aspects of this question. The revolutionists AT NO TIME gives material aid to the Peoples Front Government. The revolutionists AT ALL TIMES gives material aid only to the revolutionary Marxists and the workers organizations in action against capitalism to build the party, to build Soviets. This is the principle aspect of the question.

But if the reformists and centrists, etc., are sending material aid to the Peoples Front Government or to those whom the revolutionists are carrying on a policy of marching separately and strike together, after political criticism fails to direct this aid to the revolutionists, what shall the Marxists do?

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First, endeavor to redirect this material aid to the revolutionists. For example, when the embryo dual power of the Anti-Fascists Committees existed in Catalonia material aid sent to the badly crippled Peoples Front Generality was confiscated by the workers and their organizations, the same as the Bolsheviks and their Soviets took over equipment for their needs from the Provisional Government. Second, when the workers organizations are not strong enough to take over this material aid, when the anti-fascists committees have been dissolved, the tactic of sabotage and stopping shipments depends upon each given situation and juncture of the concealed or open civil war between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Preventing shipments or allowing shipments of aid from the reformists etc., to the Peoples Front forces will be determined by the stages of preparation for armed insurrection, and the condition of struggle against Fascism.

6-The slogan pf "march separately and strike together" is the proletariat strategy aimed to avoid support of either enemy (material aid to the Peoples Front Government, and to avoid the ultra-left error (Revolutionary defeatism) This strategy makes it possible to exploit the basic antagonism between fascism and the trade unions and other workers organizations, which are under the control of the reformists, but which must fight Fascism or be smashed the same as the Marxists and the proletarian revolutionists.

To give material aid to the Peoples Front is to aid the "democratic bourgeoisie" vs the proletariat; similarly not to see the antagonism between Fascism and the workers and peasants and their organizations, and to call for revolutionary defeatism is to play into the hands of the fascists.

The present situation in Spain is characterized by a civil war of classes and an imperialist conflict, with the imperialist conflict having the upper hand, but the antagonism between Communism and Capitalism decisive. The Trotskyites and other centrists and the Bordiguists and similar ultra-lefts revise Marxism, not only on the above question, but above all on the question of the two-fold antagonism of capitalism in the decay stage, and the distinction between Fascism and Reformism (Spain* Socialist Stalinists, Anarchists, POUM, etc. who support the Peoples Front.)

REVOLUTIONARY DEFEATISM

1- The thesis of those who support the position of revolutionary defeatism in Spain begin with the correct analysis that the July uprising of the Fascists brought to the surface the fundamental struggle between Fascism and Communism, but this position proceeds to conclude that the proletarian revolutionists have been decisively defeated and only an imperialist war remains. The Bordiguist and others stated this before the Barcelona uprising. They called for their followers to leave the country, stating the conditions were hopeless. The Barcelona uprising proved the fallacy of this position, proved that although the imperialist conflict is the main surface phenomena, the civil war remained within Spanish Society as the decisive aspect of this two-fold antagonism. The civil war aspect of the two-fold antagonism was not only decisive from the historical and potential point of view but also as a concrete condition of Spanish social forces.

Not even the defeat of the May uprising has placed the proletariat and their allies in a position of decisive defeat. A third insurrection is in the making within this revolutionary period. Its defeat would end this revolutionary upsurge, but there are possibilities in spite of the negative factors to use the next upsurge as a step to dual power, by establishing all of the necessary prerequisites for a successful revolution.

2 The second important error of the ultra-left thesis is their complete lack of the understanding of Fascism and Reformism in its peculiar Spanish forms.

Since all forms of Spanish reformism will be smashed by the victory of fascism, to say nothing of the proletariat and peasantry, the masses under reformist domination must fight to the death against Fascism. This contradiction between fascism and the masses under reformism is not negated by the fact that the reformist leaders and organizations are the agents and instruments that pave the way for fascism, and are servants of capitalism and imperialism to the same extent that the fascists are.

The overwhelming majority of the proletariat are in the two trade unions organizations, the CNT and the UGT, and the peasant organizations are under the domination of the Peoples Front. Their reformist leaders have tied them to the Anglo-French imperialist bloc. These forces must be won over to the proletarian revolution. These forces cannot be won over to the proletarian revolution on the basis of supporting the Peoples Front. These forces can be won over by fighting the Peoples Front, using correct strategy. But these forces cannot be won over on the basis of the slogan of revolutionary defeatism, which means to place the warring groups on the same level and make no distinction. The two imperialist groups are placed on the same level and BOTH must be fought. But different tactics to fight these two groups must be applied because of the basic contradiction between the Anglo-French imperialists at the TOP and the workers and peasants and their organizations under reformist control at the bottom.

3- This calls for the policy of "March separately and strike together." To march separately and strike together is to FIGHT BOTH groups of capitalists, the same as the policy of revolutionary defeatism vainly hopes to do.

Because the two capitalist groups are not equal quantities, because within the "democratic" bourgeoisie there exists a basic contradiction in relation to Fascism, the ultra-left position plays into the hands of the Fascists, just like the reformist and centrists position plays into the hands of the Peoples Front.

4- The proletarian revolutionists work to win the masses to overthrow the Peoples Front Government as quickly as possible in order to lay the only basis possible to defeat capitalism and fascism. But such does not mean nor imply the slogan of revolutionary defeatism, that is working for the defeat of the Peoples Army at the front. On the contrary, the seizure of power by the Soviets releases a hundred-fold social force that will be used at the front against fascism, that will strengthen the front against fascism as the last arm of capitalist defense. It is the peoples front that sabotages the war against fascism at the front and in the rear, not the proletarian revolutionists.

FIGHT THE CAPITALISTS ON TWO FRONTS

The Revolutionary Workers League of the United States calls for a fight against capitalism in Spain on two fronts, against the Fascists bourgeois and the Peoples Front bourgeois. Since the Peoples Front has hegemony over the majority of the workers through the reformists, and since the fascists will destroy all workers organizations, different tactics must be utilized in fighting these two forms of capitalism, to utilize the contradiction between Fascism and reformism.

At the front this calls for a fight only under the independent workers control. We are opposed to sending men to the Peoples Front army, to this front. Those who are drafted, in one form or the other must fight to take over the front, must fight for their soldiers committees, and to rebuild the workers militias. But since more is involved than merely an imperialist conflict, than imperialists using Spaniards to die for imperialists ends, since there is also a struggle between fascism and the working class, the struggle for the front is part of the struggle to make possible the decisive defeat of fascism.

Those fighting under Franco must be won over where possible, his lines must be disrupted. His forces where possible must be won for revolution. Behind Franco's lines, where revolutionists are working this calls for fraternization slogans, the calls for the struggle to defeat Franco's army.

To call for peace at the front, as part of the strategy of revolutionary defeatism between the Fascists forces and the workers trapped in the Peoples Army through reformism is to aid fascism against the workers and peasants organizations. Fascism will smash these organizations if it takes power. (OVER)

To claim that the policy of "neither victory nor defeat" is our policy is to muddy the water. The Peoples Front cannot decisively defeat Fascism even though reformism must fight fascism to save its own life. Only the Dictatorship of the Proletariat can decisively defeat fascism. This means that before the decisive battles against fascism can be won we must overthrow the Peoples Front Government, that means the DEFEAT of the Peoples Front Government. The Spanish workers tried twice, in July and in May to overthrow the Peoples Front while fighting Fascism, while marching separately and striking together with the Peoples Front against fascism.
